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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Problems of Manning the Soviet Armed Forces

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Problems of Manning the Soviet Armed Forces

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Manning the Soviet Armed Forces in all stages of their development has constituted one of the very major problems of paramount national importance. It has been, and continues to be at the center of Communist Party and Soviet Government attention.

Inevitably, with the developments in military affairs and the introduction of new weapons and military equipment into the troops, personnel requirements have grown and the forms and methods of manning the armed forces have changed.

The diversity and highly technical basis of new weapons and the complexity of their combat and operational use have drastically complicated the tasks of manning the armed forces. In contrast to the past, the current stage of military development has required a thoroughly thought-out and scientifically based process of supplying personnel to the forces which takes into account the numerous characteristics of the branches of service and arms of troops.

At present, the development of massed regular armed forces in peacetime not only raises the problem of the qualitative training of young people for military service, but also greatly complicates the problems of manning the armed forces from the quantitative standpoint. This became particularly evident at the beginning of the 1950's, when statistical data on pre-conscription and conscription ages were studied, and the prospects of providing replacements to the army and navy with youths born during World War II became evident. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the serious situation which had developed. Assuming the number of boys born in 1937 was 100, then in 1943, in relation to 1937, only 28, or 3.5 times fewer, were born. Wartime difficulties adversely affected not only the birth rate, but the health of young people as well.

The consequences of the war also affected the general education of young people: in 1950, more than 77 percent of those called up for

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military service did not have a 7-year education. In this connection it is appropriate to recall the statement of the distinguished military theoretician and leader M. V. Frunze: "Unless a soldier has a considerable degree of intellectual development, the conduct of modern, complex, and at the same time extremely specialized warfare is a hopeless cause."* If Soviet military leaders appraised the problem this way in the middle of the 1920's, it is even more urgent in the current period of military development. Successful mastery of modern weapons, equipment and the fundamentals of combat requires that our soldiers and sailors have a secondary school education for the leading branches of the armed forces and arms of troops, and incomplete secondary school education for the rest.

At the beginning of the 1950's, then, the status of conscript contingents in the country hardly satisfied the new requirements.

Solving the problem of manning the armed forces at the time they were being equipped with missile/nuclear weapons required taking a number of nation-wide measures directed toward increasing the general educational schooling and sharply improving the physical condition of pre-conscription and conscription-aged citizens.

We can include among these measures the resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the USSR**, adopted in accordance with Defense Ministry recommendations, which established the system of training youths beginning at 15 years of age, i.e., four years before induction into the army. This training of conscripts in the country has become the responsibility not only of the Ministry of Defense and its local military control organs, but also of public health service and public education organs, and of Party, Soviet, Komsomol, sports and trade union organizations.

* M. V. Frunze. Selected works, Volume 2, Military Press, 1967, page 69.
**Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 10 September 1953, "Improving medical-sanitation work among pre-conscription and conscription-aged youth"; Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 10 September 1953, "Eliminating illiteracy and low literacy among young people of pre-conscription and conscription ages"; Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, "Measures for improving the physical training of young people of pre-conscription and conscription age".

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We should emphasize that the question of training conscripts in advance and in an organized manner on a nation-wide scale has been raised for the first time in the history of the Soviet Armed Forces. The problem of fully supplying the army and navy with literate and physically healthy personnel has become the subject of great attention and constant concern to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. Special resolutions on these questions were adopted in 1960 and 1964 by the Central Committee of our Party.

However, the development of the work of training conscript contingents for manning the armed forces was hampered by several obsolete statutes. For example, under the Law of Universal Military Duty adopted in 1939, conscription districts annually registered 18-year-old youths, who until induction were on military commissariat rolls for 8 to 10 months.

Obviously this was insufficient time to complete the training of conscripts for service in the armed forces. Therefore, on 1 June 1962 the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, "Changing Article 17 of the Law of Universal Military Duty" was adopted, and in conformity with it, conscription districts began to register annually the citizens who had reached 17 years of age prior to 1 January. This increased the conscript training period from 8-10 months to 20-22 months, and military commissariats jointly with corresponding local organs were given the opportunity of fully accomplishing the measures connected with the medical treatment, schooling, and physical training of young people. In this period more favorable conditions were created for training conscripts in various military-technical specialties by DOSAAF training organizations and professional-technical education schools.

The results of the entire system of work on training pre-conscription and conscription-aged citizens for military service are shown in Table 1.

Thus, in the period 1953 to 1966 inclusive, the fitness of conscripts for military service from the health standpoint increased more than 10 percent, and their general educational schooling changed considerably. The number of conscripts having a secondary or secondary-technical education increased almost twice. There were more than twice as many conscripts who had finished grades 7 to 9. At the same time, in 14 years the number of youths not having incomplete secondary education decreased by more than a factor of 9.

Great successes also were achieved in educating the rising young people, as indicated by the steady increase of Komsomol members among

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conscripts, and also in physical development: at time of conscription, youths, as a rule, fully passed the standards for the "Ready for Work and Defense" (GTO) badges.

All of these things created favorable conditions for successfully solving the problem of manning the Soviet Armed Forces at the time they were being equipped with missile/nuclear armament. It is fully understood that the achievements in training conscription-aged citizens are inseparably linked to the overall progress of our Soviet Motherland, and the heroic labor of all Soviet people who already in the fifth decade are increasing their wealth in all spheres of Communist development.

The decisive steps taken by the Central Committee of our Party and by the Soviet Government to improve the preparation of pre-conscription and conscription-aged citizens for army service and the perseverance of local organs of the Party and Soviet government, as well as military commissariats in putting them into practice, have had a positive influence on the manning of the Soviet Armed Forces and have created favorable opportunities for ensuring the forces are fully manned.

It can be seen from Table 2 that in 1966 the Strategic Rocket Troops received more than twice as many conscripts with higher, secondary and secondary-technical education, than in 1960. Now six out of ten Rocket Troop soldiers and sergeants have higher, secondary, or secondary-technical education. The sharp rise in the educational preparation of young replacements also has been observed in the other branches of the armed forces.

It also should be taken into consideration that conscripts who finished school in the 1960's, unlike those of the 1950's, possess certain labor and industrial skills, which help them a great deal in mastering military equipment successfully and in a shorter time. Many youths, as a rule, have combined studies with work in factories, mines, on construction jobs, and on collective and State farms, acquiring various kinds of professional training before their induction into the army. We should not fail to note, either, that replacements entering the troops from agriculture have now become better prepared technically. In recent years more than 40 percent of the replacements have been agricultural machine-operators. Thanks to the growth of technical and professional training in 1966 more than 60 percent of the conscripts sent to man the Strategic Rocket Troops and almost 70 percent of those sent to the Navy had worked in industry, transportation, and construction.

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In this connection it is useful to make a comparison with our situation after the Civil War. Of the young replacements assigned to the Red Army in 1924, 16 percent were conscripts who previously worked in industry, transportation, and construction. More than 80 percent of the replacements were conscripted from agriculture, and only a few of these had technical training. The successes of the selfless struggle of the Communist Party and the Soviet people for the triumph of Leninist ideas are reflected quite vividly in this comparison.

The considerable number of technical specialists among conscripts has permitted us to solve the problem of manning the Soviet Armed Forces in a new way. Beginning in 1959, manning was based on the principle of industrial specialty and qualifications, which means that conscripts working in factories, enterprises, and institutions producing missile, aviation, and tank equipment and radiotechnical gear, had to be assigned when conscripted to missile, aviation, tank, radio, and radiotechnical units correspondingly.

However, despite the fact that seven years already have passed since this manning principle was introduced, we cannot say this problem has been completely solved. The reason for this lies in the difficulty of planning conscription by the industrial principle and in the fact that central organs and the staffs of military districts do not have the necessary data available for such planning. Obviously, records on the status of conscript resources by qualifications and industrial specialties should be expanded. Therefore, if we are talking of further prospective development in the manning of the armed forces by the industrial principle, then its accomplishment is inevitably tied to the receipt and processing of a huge amount of information on the many hundreds of professions of the conscripts. In our view, one of the principal ways of solving this problem is to introduce mechanized information recording and processing from top to bottom. This is all the more important since improving and developing the stated principle will further increase troop combat readiness and permit us to exploit rationally the favorable capabilities for technical growth of Soviet youth in manning the armed forces with young replacements.

Thus we can say that we have had some success in solving the problem of manning the armed forces at the time they were being equipped with missile/nuclear weapons. Accordingly, particular attention was paid to the qualitative selection of replacements for the Strategic Rocket Troops and Navy. The most educated, healthy, and physically fit young people are selected for these branches of service.

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At the same time, our experience in manning the armed forces has convinced us that at the present time the medical examination of conscripts is still inadequate. The appearance of missile/nuclear weapons and the wide introduction of radioelectronics and complicated types of combat equipment have brought about radical changes in the nature of troop combat actions. In modern warfare troops are required to have, in addition to a great deal of knowledge and high moral-political attributes, exceptional endurance and the capability to withstand enormous physical and nervous strain many times greater than in past wars. In other words, missile/nuclear weapons which have extraordinarily increased the powers of troops, have called into being new ordeals of unparalleled difficulty. The soldier must be prepared not only to control and use these weapons, but also to withstand the effects of the same enemy weapons. The intense physical strain for every soldier is amplified by severe psychological strain.

In our view, the task of the manning organs and medical commissions of military commissariats will be one of carefully selecting conscripts, taking into consideration the psychological characteristics of each of them. It is absolutely unjustifiable, for example, to send youths who have had nervous-psychological disorders into military service. Rocket Troop manning, for example, requires selecting young people who possess instantaneous reactions and the ability to solve complex problems in a short time, make numerous calculations, and react quickly to abrupt changes in the situation. The submarine fleet, where service involves long voyages under difficult conditions, also demands great psychological tolerance and endurance from a person. All these characteristics must be carefully considered by the conscription commissions of military commissariats when conscripting citizens for active military service.

The experience of manning the armed forces in the postwar period shows that providing the troops with personnel must constantly correspond to the level of development of military affairs, which requires anticipating new manning problems which arise during the development and improvement of the troops.

The profound economic and social reforms taking place in the life of our society, the increasing level of political development, the general educational and technical schooling of Soviet youth, and the basic changes in equipping troops with the newest combat equipment and modern weapons have created the prerequisites for solving other, essentially new problems in the manning of the armed forces.

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In our opinion, the solution of problems arising in connection with the urgent need to reduce the terms of active military service must now take center stage. Four-year service in the navy and three-year in the other branches of military service are very long terms which at present the other socialist countries (except Communist China) and capitalist countries do not have. Obviously, it is difficult to serve a fixed term of 3 to 4 years. Meanwhile, we have every reason to reduce the term of service, primarily because of those qualitative changes in the schooling of young people which were previously discussed.

Introducing shorter terms of active military service for soldiers, sailors, sergeants and petty officers will entail restructuring the conscription and manning system of the armed forces. At present, under the current Law of Universal Military Duty, once a year, in the autumn citizens are conscripted and servicemen who have served an established term are released to the reserve. Thus one-third of the soldiers and approximately 50 percent of the sergeants are replaced annually. If we reduced the term of service to two years and retained the existing one-time callup, we would have to discharge every autumn not a third, but half of the soldiers. This situation would complicate the task of maintaining continuous troop combat readiness. Apparently this problem most probably must be solved by conducting two callups per year, conscripting 25 percent of the requirement in both spring and autumn and discharging the same number of soldiers at these same times.

The problem of supplying the armed forces with sergeants and petty officers has become especially acute.

As we know, at present approximately 50 percent of the sergeants of the troops and 33 percent of the petty officers from navy ships are released annually to the reserve. Reducing service one year would require replacing annually 100 percent of the sergeants in units with a 2-year term, and 50 percent of the petty officers on naval vessels. Simultaneously replacing this number of sergeants and petty officers certainly is not in the interests of the armed forces and we cannot concur with this position on manning the army and navy with sergeants and petty officers. Ensuring the combat readiness of units and ships requires finding the most practical solutions to this problem. In the meantime, it is difficult to say what specific ways will be found. However, it is clear that the increasing level of general educational and technical knowledge of young people provides us the opportunity of training sergeants and petty officers in a shorter time than now is the case.

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Apparently the need has arisen to significantly increase the scope of specialist training in DOSAAF training organizations, especially of truck drivers, tracked artillery prime mover driver-mechanics, parachutists, and communications specialists. We cannot rule out the requirement that DOSAAF training organizations develop the preparation of new specialties for tank troops, artillery, and engineer and chemical troops.

As we know, initial military training for students was abolished in our country in 1946, and the conscript training established by the Law of Universal Military Duty was discontinued in 1962.

When reducing the term of active military service, young people must be given military training before they are inducted into the army and navy so as to accelerate incorporating young servicemen into the ranks. Since our youths are educated in schools, technical schools, and other secondary educational institutions or work in industry, it is advisable to introduce compulsory military training in these learning institutions and enterprises once they have been provided with the necessary cadre of military instructors.

In conclusion we should note that the manning system must be continuously improved and developed, and should be the subject of constant concern if we want our armed forces always to maintain a level which safeguards the national interests of the USSR and the socialist camp as a whole. The task consists of constantly focusing on the problems of training Soviet youth to perform military service and of manning the armed forces, and of resolving in a timely manner all difficulties arising in this important national matter.

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Table 1

Changes in the growth of conscripted contingent qualifications for the period 1955-1966

(Per conscription district annual registration data, in percentages)

Data designation	Registered birth year														
	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945*	1946	1947	1948
	Registration year														
1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966		
(Physically) Registered, fit for military service	78.8	78.7	79.1	78.8	74.5	71.8	70.7	72.5	79.7	81.6	85.1	85.9	87.3	89.0	
With secondary and secondary-technical education	22.7	28.6	31.7	32.8	34.4	34.3	36.6	38.0	40.7	43.3	40.3	40.7	40.6	40.6	
With 9-7th grade education	19.0	22.6	25.2	30.5	32.1	34.2	34.7	36.0	37.0	37.6	44.9	48.6	51.0	53.4	
With 6-4th grade education	49.1	42.7	38.9	34.2	31.6	30.0	27.4	25.0	21.3	18.4	14.4	10.5	8.2	5.8	
With less than 4th grade education	9.2	6.1	4.2	2.5	1.9	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	
Komsomol members	39.3	43.1	44.2	45.7	42.9	45.2	44.4	48.4	53.0	58.4	60.6	59.3	57.3	64.3	
Grade I & II GTO badge holders	14.1	15.6	16.5	17.4	22.6	28.9	29.7	33.3	41.8	45.7	49.9	48.5	51.3	67.3	

*Under the 1 July 1962 decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, registration age was lowered from 18 to 17, therefore in 1963 two birth years were registered simultaneously.

Table 2

Changes in the qualitative status of young replacements assigned to the branches of service (in percentages)

Branches of service	Rocket Troops		Ground Forces		Air Defense of the Country		Air Force		Navy	
	1960	1966	1958	1966	1958	1966	1958	1966	1958	1966
<u>Year replacement arrived</u>										
<u>By education</u>										
With higher, secondary and secondary-technical education	27.4	61.9	23.0	35.0	30.7	53.5	27.9	43.1	28.0	56.5
With 9-7th grade education	54.3	36.6	46.0	59.0	56.5	44.0	56.2	53.6	56.0	41.1
With 6-4th grade education	18.3	1.5	31.0	6.0	12.8	2.5	15.9	3.3	16.0 80.0	2.1 97.2
<u>By occupation</u>										
Working in industry, construction and transportation	56.8	60.1	50.2	57.5	54.4	58.8	53.5	59.3	58.6	69.4
Working in agriculture	37.7	23.5	43.5	28.1	38.7	25.7	40.2	26.5	34.8	18.4
<u>By Party membership</u>										
Members and candidate members of the Soviet Communist Party, and Komsomol members	69.2	86.5	61.7	80.5	65.3	81.8	63.9	80.9	66.4	71.2
<u>By physical fitness</u>										
Grade I and II GTO badge holders	89.7	93.0	78.2	88.6	80.0	93.1	73.5	88.1	84.0	87.3